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## Voluntary Consensus Standards (VCSs) - Purpose and Process

The National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act (NTTAA) of 1995 mandates that all federal agencies use technical standards developed and adopted by voluntary consensus standards bodies, as opposed to developing unique government standards. But why use a voluntary consensus standard? Why use ASME/NQA-1?

A *standard* is a set of technical definitions, instructions, requirements and guidelines that provide for consistent and comparable results. Standards range in length from a few paragraphs to hundreds of pages. They are written by committees comprised of a systematical, international, cross-section of the specific industry's technical experts. These experts volunteer their time, knowledge, and experience by routinely meeting to reassess their standard to ensure it is adequate and represents the cutting-edge of industry needs and lessons learned. This is the purpose of a standard.

Developing, issuing and maintaining a VCS involves committee membership and participation. Standards committees represent the users, manufacturers, consultants, academia, testing laboratories, and government regulatory agencies. Committees keep a balance of members among the various interest categories so that no one group dominates. All committee meetings are open to the public, and procedures are used to govern processes including voting on changes to the standard. Changes to the standard are approved through consensus voting as defined by ANSI. All votes and comments on technical documents during the approval process must be documented and available to the public. Any individual may appeal any action or inaction of a committee relating to membership or the standard. In addition, if anyone feels that due process has not been provided, they can make an appeal to a supervisory board, and finally to the Board on Hearings and Appeals. More often than not, more than one vote cycle is necessary to resolve comments.

Once consensus is achieved, the revised standard draft is submitted for a public online review. During this review, anyone may submit comments, to which the committee must respond. In addition, the standard must then undergo an ANSI and supervisory board review. Once all considerations and comments have been satisfactorily addressed, the standard is approved and published. But the work of the committee is not over -- the standard is meant to be a living document that is continually being reviewed, updated, revised and reissued to reflect new developments and technical advances as well as incorporate lessons learned from industry.

The ASME/NQA-1 Standard for *Quality Assurance Requirements for Nuclear Facility Applications* serves as a global nuclear industry standard responsible for the safety and quality of nuclear facilities and activities. This VCS is routinely updated to reflect industry experience and current understanding on how to achieve safe, reliable, and efficient cradle-to-grave control of the nuclear industry's activities.

In summary, Voluntary Consensus Standards

- are written by committees of technical experts who continually assess the standard to ensure it is adequate and effective;
- these committee members are comprised of a cross-section of users, manufacturers, consultants, academia, testing laboratories, and government agencies who volunteer their time, knowledge, and experience;

- new and modified information for standards include comments provided by committee members and the public; and
- approval of the final drafts is obtained via consensus voting.

The use of ASME/NQA-1 where appropriate not only helps the industry, the Department, and most importantly, the Public.